



ISSSP Perspective

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES (NIAS)

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India and US: Converting the Defence Relations into a Strategic Partnership

Report of ISSSP Perspective discussion held on 31 August 2017

International Strategic and Security Studies Programme (ISSSP), organized a lecture by Prof Amit Gupta titled, “India and US: Converting the Defence Relations into a Strategic Partnership,” on 31 August, 2017. The lecture took a critical account of the current trajectory of India-US defence relations and brought out few possible areas of cooperation between the two countries. Below are the excerpts from the lecture.

About the Speaker

Prof Amit Gupta teaches International Security Studies at the USAF Air War College. His current research is on US National Security Policy and on the impact of Globalization on International Politics. He has written extensively on arms control, weapons proliferation, arms production and arms transfers. He is the author of two books and four edited books. He has two forthcoming edited books with Howard Hensel: *Interests, Objectives, and Contemporary Policies in a Globalized Space: Naval Powers in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific*. Routledge, 2018 (forthcoming); *Maritime Heritage and Challenges in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific*, Routledge, 2018 (forthcoming).

Unlike India, United States has only two strategic partnerships- one with Great Britain and other with Israel. The partnership with Great Britain goes back to the Monroe doctrine while with Israel is a post-Second World War phenomenon..

Keeping the above geostrategic partnerships of US in mind, it should be acknowledged that there exists no such cultural-emotional tie between India and America. Therefore if India seeks prolonged US partnership in its fight against terrorism (playing the victim card) it might have worked in 2009 but not in 2017 when there are frequent terror attacks in France, a country with whom America has emotional ties. In addition, the stalling and delaying attitude of bureaucracy has marred India as business unfriendly. The Hawk deal was signed in 1984 but its first consignment reached in 2004.

The constraints in India-US relationship should be addressed by looking at the practical over the desirable goals. Defence deals with Japan are more practical and needs to be developed.



This could work for great stability in Asia and act as a force multiplier for India's defence capabilities. With great enthusiasm India has discussed about buying the Shin Maywa but it hasn't materialised. India should capitalise on Japan's conventional submarine potential- the Soryu. When Indian defence deals with US are observed, it is much smaller than those in the West Asia. This chalks out clearly the US focus. As far the question of cutting edge tech transfer is concerned, it is imprudent to expect openness.

Herein brings the need to look at Chinese defence development. China has made a smooth transition from *technonationalism* to *technoglobalisation* by bringing in Russian and Israeli technologies. China's geo-economics for strategic gains has played out prudently.

Make in India needs to focus and begin by defining a real 'strategic partnership.' The term strategic partnership has lost all significance. India has such partnerships with all country rather than close allies. In this juncture, a common security goal between the two countries has to be envisioned by manoeuvring the force multipliers. There is a need to choose between operability over practical deliverables. For example, acquiring C17 over F 16 will make India efficient enough to participate in military exercises, disaster relief operations humanitarian intervention. To conclude, India has burgeoning IT relations, people-to-people relations (education) and a corporate (film industry) synergy with America. But the Indian diaspora in America should be able to return to India and contribute to skill development. India can move beyond the transactional relationships and look at practical strategic convergence, once our long term and short term goals are defined.

In the concluding interactive session, the lecture further touched on key issues beyond the defence relations. Issues relating to the interoperability of the defence deals, the relevance of 'string of pearls' policy, the potential consequence of the Belt Road Initiative and the debt bonds of the Chinese companies were discussed.

The report is prepared by Ms. Sourina Bej, Research Associate at the ISSSP.

